

JOHN & JAMES DOBSON CARPET MILL (WEST PARCEL),
BUILDING NO. 5
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5383-E

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695E-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
Mid-Atlantic Regional Office
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
JOHN AND JAMES DOBSON CARPET MILL (West Parcel), BUILDING 5
HABS No. PA-5383-E

Location:

4041-4055 Ridge Avenue
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

Present Owner:

Rouse Urban Housing, Inc.
1500 Walnut Street, 19th Floor
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19102

Present Occupant:

Mixed commercial and industrial tenants and vacant.

Significance:

Building 5 (originally Building 17) was built in 1880 to house additional specialized functions for the Brussels Carpet Mill. It reflects the characteristic rubblestone mill architecture of the complex and it documents the continued prosperity and expansion of the Dobsons' mill.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

Date(s) of Erection:

1880 with alterations in the early/mid-twentieth century. The 1885 Hexamer Survey documents the erection of this building.

Architect:

Unknown.

Original/Subsequent Owners:

See Chain of Title.

Builder, Contractor, Suppliers:

Unknown.

Original Plans/Construction:

Building 5 (originally Building 17) was built adjacent to Building 4. The building partially defined the courtyard formed by the structures of the Brussels Carpet Mill. It was constructed as a 4-story, rubblestone, rectangular structure with a tin roof. The floor heights were 12' and the walls ranged in width from 36" to 24". An exterior bridge extended between the second and third story loading bays of the building to the tower of the original Brussels Carpet Mill to the south. Three roof monitors with windows were located on the low pitched gable roof. At the eastern end of the building was a 1-story, stone with tin roof blacksmith shop. Building 5 was adjacent to Building 4 to the south. The 1885 Hexamer Survey indicates that there were windows in every story between the buildings but no doorways. A stairway was located at the western end of the building. Building 5 originally housed a carpenter and machine shop on the first floor, a finishing and burling room on the second, a tapestry weaving room on the third and a plush weaving room on the fourth. (It should be noted that there was a much smaller Building 17 located on the site of the present Building 5. Composed of two parts, the building had a two-story section which functioned as a stable and hay loft and a later frame section for the storing of machinery parts and wool. It appears that Building 17 was demolished in its entirety to construct Building 5.)

Alterations/Additions:

Building 5 has undergone relatively few alterations since its construction in 1880. The roof monitors were removed sometime after 1894 and a number of the windows have been altered or infilled. Backfill during the mid-twentieth century has partially obscured the ground floor on the northern elevation and completely obscured it on the eastern elevation.

B. Historical Context

Building 5 was built at a time when the Dobsons' were rapidly expanding their complex to include facilities for plush fabric manufacturing and increased carpet production. The specialized functions of this building included operations for both lines of production. The building's similar construction and proportions to other buildings on the site documents the Dobsons' desire at this time to maintain a unified and monumental appearance to their complex.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

Architectural Character:

The architectural character of Building 5 is similar to the other mill architecture on the site with rubblestone construction, brick segmental arched windows and regularly spaced fenestration.

Condition of Fabric:

The masonry of the building is in generally good condition but the mortar has deteriorated and eroded in several areas.

B. Description of Exterior

Overall Dimensions:

Approximately 142' x 63'.

Foundations:

Rubblestone.

Walls:

Rubblestone relieved by brick window arches. Mortar joints are severely eroded in many locations. North elevation- ground floor is completely obscured by infill, simple wooden cornice at gable; facade is disfigured by a steel fire escape and two heating pipes which connect to Building 17. East elevation- ground floor obscured by infill. South elevation- iron clamps punctuate the piers between each window bay and mark the iron tie rods. West elevation- a simple wooden cornice caps the gable at the roof.

Structural System/Framing:

Masonry construction with heavy timber framing.

Porches/Stoops/Balconies/Bulkheads:

None.

Chimneys:

None.

Openings:

Doorways/Doors:

North elevation- window opening altered to doorway and infilled with braced door that has been relocated from another location. East elevation- none. South elevation- brick arched opening on first floor infilled with modern garage door, above single bay of vertical board double-leaf doors recessed in brick arched openings, single entrance at east end of first floor. West elevation- two window openings, one at first floor, one at second, altered to doors, both infilled, steel lintel-headed garage entrance on ground floor.

Windows/Shutters:

All elevations have regularly spaced windows with brick segmental arches and wood jambs; the majority of the windows have been infilled. North elevation- seventeen bays. East elevation- seven bays. South elevation- nine bays, some of the second and third story windows retain their original 15/20 wood sash windows. West elevation- seven bays, second story retains most of its original 15/20 wood sash windows.

Roof:

Low pitched gable with original roof monitors removed, presently composed of a built-up roof carried on wood rafters which are supported by a central ridge beam carried on wooden columns.

C. Description of Interior

Floor Plans:

The building is built on grade with no basement. Other floors have rectangular, open mill space. Upper stories are divided into east and west rooms that are separated by an interior hall housing a staircase; central row of wooden columns carrying exposed floor joists divides the rooms.

Stairways:

Interior central stair between east and west ends.

Flooring:

Unfinished wood floors.

Wall/Ceiling Finishes:

Walls are of plastered rubble and painted throughout. Ceilings are exposed timber and planking.

Openings:

Doorways/Doors:

No surviving original or historic interior doors.

Windows:

All windows recessed in unornamented plaster reveals with wood plank sills.

Decorative Features and Trim:

N/A.

Hardware:

Original hardware, which is no longer extant, is presumed to have been utilitarian in character.

Mechanical Equipment:

Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: See PA-5383-C for heating system, air conditioning is N/A, ventilation by window mounted fans, exhaust ducts or air conditioning units.

Lighting: Modern and strip fluorescent, ceiling mounted, lighting.

Plumbing: Early-20th-century ceiling mounted sprinkler fire suppression system.

D. Site

General Setting/Orientation:

Building 5 is located in the center of the west parcel of the Dobson complex and forms a "U" with Buildings 1, 3 and 4 to define a courtyard. The building, due to its height and location is prominent on the site. Its primary elevation faces west.

Historic Landscape Design:

See Historic Context Section.

Outbuildings:

N/A.